



Al-Risala 1986

July

2 July 1986

Editorial

A Persian poet writes: "A hundred times have I fought with my beloved; a hundred times have I befriended her. She knew nothing of my fighting or of my befriending."

This statement may seem to belong to the world of poetry, but it also has enormous relevance to the real world. It gives us an insight into the type of people needed to achieve any great purpose in life, that is, those who possess the quality, mentioned in this verse, of being able to bury within themselves the grudges that they feel towards others.

No great objective can be attained by lone individuals. Several people have to strive together if even the simplest things are to be achieved. But united effort, besides having many advantages, also presents one great problem – the problem of people differing among themselves.

Whenever people work together, it is inevitable that various disagreements and grievances should arise. Sometimes one will receive a smaller share of the credit, while another receives a larger portion. Some attain to high positions while others have to be satisfied with lower ranks. At times, it is something which has been said which offends another; at others it is some ill-considered action which seems to hurt another's interests. Whatever the bone of contention may be, there are bound to be repeated occasions which lead to resentment. There will always be times when one feels anger, jealousy, vindictiveness and animosity towards some colleague.

There is only one practical solution in such situations. That is, every individual has to turn himself into a self-correcting machine. He must defuse within himself the antipathy which he feels towards another. The grudges which he harbours have to be forgotten. Only then will people be able to work and struggle on together.

This is what Khalid ibn Walid did when the Caliph of those days, Umer ibn Khattab, removed him from his post as commander of the Muslim forces in Palestine. At the time, he felt extremely aggrieved. But then he thought: I am fighting, not for Umer, but for the sake of Umer's Lord, it is from Him that I hope for reward, so why be angry with Umer. Instead of airing his grievances, he settled them within himself.

3 July 1986

Sacrifice

How does so miraculous a thing as a tree come into being? It is by a tiny seed giving itself up to the task, sacrificing itself so that a lush, verdant tree can grow out of the ground. And how is a house built? Ask the bricks from which it is built, and they will tell you that it is through some of them having buried themselves. That is how a construction comes to stand erect.

And that is the way that man should construct his own life as well – through sacrifice. It is only if some of the individuals making up a society are ready to sacrifice their own futures that the future of humanity will take a constructive turn. And no community will prosper if a certain number of its members are not willing to accept adversity – even ruin – as their lot in life. Construction stands upon the bedrock of sacrifice. That is one of the immutable laws of nature. It applies in every walk of life – in the human world, just as in nature.

Every construction has a top, which we can all see. But we sometimes forget about the base, for it lies buried, deep in the ground. Yet, it is upon this invisible base that the whole building rests. There has to be this foundation and, in order to lay it, there have to be individuals who are prepared, figuratively speaking, to bury themselves in the ground. That is what is meant by sacrifice.

An individual might, in a fit of emotion, give his very life for some cause, but that is not what sacrifice is all about. Real sacrifice means taking a part so small and so inconspicuous in constructive work that it is almost invisible, and this, no matter how prolonged the period or how far off ultimate success appears to be. It entails a struggle which offers neither fame nor wealth; it is to 'bury' oneself in order to build, to forge a future by giving up the present.

The progress of the entire nation is dependent upon there being some elements of society who are ready to make such sacrifices. They are the seeds which, buried in the ground, give life to humanity; they are bricks on whose foundation mankind builds anew (110:11).

3 July 1986

Fear God at all times

Umer Ibn al Khattab wrote a letter to Abu Moosa Al-Ashari, in which he offered this advice: "Fear God always. Learn the Book of God, for it is the fountain-head of knowledge, and reviver of sunken hearts."

Knowledge: The Greatest Charity

Abu Hurairah reported the Prophet Mohammad as saying: "The greatest charity is for a Muslim to learn something, and then teach it to his Muslim brother." (*Ahmad*)

What is charity? One might define it as an expression of sincere good will towards one's fellow men – a genuine act of brotherly love. This good will manifest itself in various ways – sometimes in the form of a material gift, sometimes as a piece of good advice. Whatever form it takes, the good will that wells up in one person's heart towards another is a sign of God's own munificence. The most noble form that it can take in the human world is the imparting of knowledge.

Knowledge – by which we mean realization of truth – is the most wonderful thing in the whole universe. That is why there is nothing greater than knowledge that one human being can impart to another. All true knowledge has come from God. To hand it on to others means that one desires the very best for them; one wishes them to share in a gift of God.

To give knowledge to others often requires a spirit of self-denial. It is a question of sympathizing with the plight of others – then striving to improve their condition. One stands oneself in others' shoes – seeing things from their point of view and then approaching them from the appropriate angle. And one has to do something more which, for some, is in the nature of a great sacrifice: one has to put an end to all bones of contention that exists between oneself and others. If one feels that one has something to give others – some knowledge to impart then one cannot stop for differences of opinion or simply wait for others to take the initiative. One has to do so oneself, taking unilateral action in order to create a harmonious atmosphere, conducive to communication of ideas.

To give to others, one has frequently to make sacrifices. This is true of knowledge – the greatest charity – just as it is true of material charity. But it is this sacrifice that people are usually not ready to make. Unable to resign themselves to any loss, they fall far short of giving others the benefit of what they themselves possess.

5 July 1986

Wealth The great Deceiver

"It is not poverty that I fear for you," the Prophet Mohammad once addressed his followers. "What I fear for you is that you should have too much access to worldly wealth, as happened to communities that passed before you; and you become emulous of it, as was the case with them." This Hadith, reported by Amr ibn Auf, has been propounded in both Bukhari and Muslim, the two main collections of traditions of the Prophet.

What the Prophet warned of, we have seen happening in recent decades all over the Muslim world. The Muslim have had worldly wealth lavished upon them and with it have been put to a severe test. In far-off lands, they had palatial houses to live in, limousines to drive, inflated bank balances to draw on, credit cards to keep them in luxury in any corner of the globe. All these things, and much else besides, have come with the accumulation of worldly wealth.

The trouble with great wealth is that it is all too often bought at the price of personal integrity. All too often it proves the great deceiver, tainting one's vision and preventing one from seeing things as they truly are. What is before our eyes today, we come to think of as permanent; but it will be gone tomorrow.

For this reason, worldly wealth has no value in itself. Let's look at the matter in everyday terms. If one has a certificate of loyalty to America, for instance, it will not be of any use to one in the Soviet Union, because loyalty to the former indicates disloyalty to the latter. So it is with this world and the next. Great expertise in worldly affairs will be of no avail when one stands before God in the next world.

Then it will only be realities which count. What a pity it is that man is lost in his own illusions, that he is allowing himself to go astray in what is, after all, only a transitory phase of his existence, quite unmindful of the fact that what awaits him is eternity.

5 July 1986

Testing time.

Ibn Abdul Bar has written that it is at times of anger that a person's patience can be gauged.

Here's an Idea

In the lifetime of the Prophet, the then chieftain of Medina, Abu al Haytham – an idolator – Came to Mecca. With him were some youths of the Banu Abd al Ashhal, among whom was one Iyas ibn Muadh, who later became a Muslim. Their purpose in coming to Mecca was to seek the alliance of the Quraysh in their struggle against their Medinan rivals – the Khazraj. When the Prophet Mohammad heard of their arrival, he went to see them. "Would you like to hear about something better than what you came for?" He asked them. "What's that?" they enquired. "I am God's Messenger," the Prophet explained. "He has sent me to mankind, to call them unto Him and to urge them to worship Him, ascribing no partners unto Him. He has revealed unto me a Book." He then recited some of the Quran to them, and explained the teachings of Islam. Hearing the Prophet's words, Iyas ibn Muadh exclaimed, "My people, this is indeed much better than what we came for."

In those days Mecca was the cultural, religious, social and commercial capital of the Arabian peninsula. People used to flock there for various purposes. Most people came pilgrimages, but many also had political motives for making the trip to Mecca. It is clear from biographies of the Prophet that, whenever he heard of the arrival of such a group, he used to go and see them, and tell them about Islam. Some would accept the message, others would reject it; but while the Prophet and his companions remained in Mecca, everyone who came to that town at least heard about Islam.

Much the same situation exists today, here in modern India. People nowadays come from all over the world to the Indian subcontinent. Some come for education, others for tourism; some have commercial purposes in mind, others are engaged in social activities. The vast majority of these foreign visitors are non-Muslims. To many, India has become the Mecca of the modern world. So the opportunities which were open to the Prophet Mohammad and his companions in ancient times, are extant here today.

Sadly, however, it is people of other faiths who have availed of these opportunities, while Muslims have done very little in this regard. Following the example of their Prophet, they should have gone to these foreign visitors and offered to show them something better than what they came for – Islam. Were they to do so, they would surely find some people, like Iyas ibn Muadh, who would convey the message to their own people, affirming that Islam was indeed better than what they had originally had in mind.

7 July 1986

The Scientific Temper

In the world of science, the standard measure of superior performance is the Nobel Prize. How is it that one qualifies for such recognition? Mr. H.A. Krebs, a Nobel prize winner himself, has made a study of what goes into the making of a great scientist. To him, what is more important than having access to well-equipped laboratories and up-to-date libraries, is to have been fortunate enough to have benefited for some time from the company of a great scientist. He says that if he had not spent time in the company of a scientist of the stature of Otoberg, it is extremely unlikely that he would have cultivated a truly scientific outlook.

Krebs is not alone in holding this view. Many other great scientists have felt that the company of a great scholar plays a major role in developing scientific tastes. The main point about such company is not just that it serves as an enormous source of scientific facts and figures – for such data is obtainable in so many other ways – but that it affords opportunities for the transference of a special attitude of mind from the great man to his students, which Krebs appropriately calls 'a general scientific spirit'. It is this distinctive outlook which is the mark of the true scholar.

He writes, moreover, that his attitude must be marked by humility and enthusiasm, for these two virtues are the greatest stepping stones to the heights of progress. Enthusiasm spurs on; it excites feelings of curiosity and stimulates him to search unflaggingly for the truth. The search in itself is a wonderful activity, but the greatness will elude the seeker if he does not humble himself before the superior reality. A man who recognizes that his existence and endeavour are on a lower plane will be willing to admit his mistakes immediately – an indispensable trait in a true scientist. In confessing his shortcomings, he risks no loss of dignity, for a man of true scientific vision holds truth above all things.

When Truth Comes out Into the Open

All the Prophets who have come from God have met a similar fate: they were ignored by the great figures of their society. People who were themselves the focus of popular attention did not pay any regard to the Prophets who had been sent by God.

All these great established figures not only believed in God; they also believed that God sent His Prophets to the world. Some of them were even awaiting a new Prophet. In their sermons they used to recall ecstatically the prophecies of his advent. But when he came to the world, not only did they not recognize him, but they denied him and poured scorn upon him.

Their religion consisted of blind adherence to the religion of their forefathers. That is why they were only able to recognize those Prophets who had established themselves in the contest of ancestral religion. Such Prophets were part and parcel of the national heritage, the root-source of great historical traditions. People who could only recognize a Prophet by extraneous attributes such as these failed to recognize contemporary Prophets, for they could not detect in them the attributes which they looked for in a Prophet. A contemporary Prophet has only the intrinsic worth of his teachings to show that he is a Prophet; he does not have the ratification of society and convention. To be able to recognize a contemporary Prophet, then, one must be able to judge matters on pure merit. This was something that these people proved unable to do.

While denying the Prophet of the day, they at the same time presented themselves as standard-bearers of the Faith, champions of religious institutions in the public eye. They prided themselves on their affiliation to ancient Prophets. But their piety did not raise them in God's sight, for it came from a blind adherence to convention rather than from a conscious acknowledgement of truth.

In the next world the stark truth will be made manifest to these people. They will be shown that the one they ridiculed was the very one whom God had chosen to teach His word. How then will they be able to hold up their heads in the everlasting world of God, when they had denied God's representative on earth? When the time of reckoning is upon them, lamenting their failure to see and believe the light which would have illuminated their path for all time will be of no avail. It will then be too late to make amends."

Making full use of Opportunities

The Treaty of Hudaibiyya, which took place six years after the Prophet's emigration to Medina, stands out as a watershed in the course of Islamic history. In his handling of the negotiations, the Prophet Mohammad showed extraordinary practical wisdom. He approached the Quraysh from the angle on which he knew they would be most accessible. Though bitterly opposed to his mission, there was a strong element among the Quraysh that did not want to fight the Prophet, and preferred that he should turn his attention to other Arab tribes besides themselves. The Prophet was fully aware of this feeling among the Quraysh, and used it to full advantage.

Utbah ibn Rabiah was eminent among the chieftains of the Quraysh. Once, before the Emigration, he was chosen by the Quraysh to speak to the Prophet on their behalf. The exchange between Utbah and the Prophet is described in details in biographies of the Prophet. This is what Utbah said on returning to the Quraysh:

"Hear what I say, Quraysh. Do not stand in between this man and what he is set on; leave him alone. If the Arabs gain ascendancy over him, they will have done your work for you. And if he wins the day, his sovereignty will be your sovereignty, his honour yours."

(*Seerat Ibn Hisham*, Vol. I, p. 314)

Two years after the Prophet's emigration to Medina, before doing battle with the Muslims at Badr, the Quraysh held consultations among themselves. Utbah, speaking on behalf of one group of the Quraysh, took up his earlier stance. "You can achieve nothing," he told the assembled Qurayshites, "by doing battle with Mohammad and his companions. Were you to meet them in battle, every one of us would be facing cousins and kinsfolk – ones whom we are loathe to slay. Let us turn back, and not stand in the way of Mohammad and other Arab tribes. If they defeat him, it is his defeat that you are after. Even if he emerges victorious, if you have not fought against him, you will be safe."

(*Seerat Ibn Hisham*, Vol. II, p. 263)

There is no way, in this world of trial and competition, that one can bring a rival party fully round to one's own position. In order to persuade others to agree to one's own demands, one has to give in to a few of theirs. Such situations are indeed a test of our wisdom and insight. They require us to scrutinize the demands of our rivals, to see if there are any which can be met. That is the only way to forge a better deal for ourselves. The Prophet did this at Hudaibiyya. He saw that, deep down, the Quraysh wanted peace, as long as Mohammad would leave them alone. So, when the Meccans barred the Muslims' way to Mecca, the Prophet sent them this message:

"We have just come to visit the House of God; we have not come to fight anybody. What good has fighting done the Quraysh? It has done them nothing but crippling harm. If they agree, I am willing to make peace with them. They should not stand in the way of myself and other Arab tribes. If I win through, they can do as other people have done and enter Islam. The victory of Islam will be their own victory. And if I am defeated, they will have their way."

(Ibid)

In offering peace, the Prophet was exploiting a feeling that already existed among the Quraysh. Thus he was able to pave the way for a great breakthrough in the progress of his preaching mission. Once peace was made with the Quraysh, there was nothing to hinder him from approaching Arab tribes, and inviting them to embrace Islam. In just two years the star of Islam spiralled, from straggling on the horizon, to a position of dominance in the sky of Arabia. This was only made possible by the Prophet's astute detection of what the Quraysh actually wanted, and agreement to their demands.

10 July 1986

Meeting out justice equally

Ali lost a coat of armour in the Battle of Jamal. One day he was walking in the market. He saw that a Christian was selling a coat of armour, and recognized it as his own. "That coat of armour is mine," Ali said. "A Muslim Qazi will judge between us." Ali was Commander of the Faithful at that time and Qazi Shuraih was Chief Justice. The case was brought before the Qazi. Ali asked him to judge between himself and the Christian. "What is your claim?" the Qazi asked him. "That this coat of armour is mine," Ali replied. "What do you have to say," the Qazi addressed the Christian, "The Commander of the Faithful is mistaken; it belongs to me," the Christian replied. The Qazi then asked Ali who his witnesses were, and Ali brought forward his son Hasan and slave Qanbar. The Qazi told him to bring another witness instead of Hasan. "Do you reject the evidence of Hasan?" Ali said to him. "That's not the point," the Qazi said, "but I have heard you yourself say that the evidence of a son in support of his father is not acceptable."

A Difference of Substance

There is an interesting background to this verse of the Quran:

"Whenever Our revelations are recited to them, they say: 'We have heard them. If we wished, we could speak the like. They are but fables of the ancients'" (8:31).

This verse was revealed about an inhabitant of ancient Mecca by the name of Nadhr ibn Harith, who used to go on trading expeditions to Iran. There he would hear tales of Persian kings, and of the famous warriors Rustam and Asfandyar. On his return to Mecca, he would then relate them to the people. Then the Prophet started reciting the Quran to the people of Mecca. Nadhr ibn Harith used to ridicule the Quran publicly. Presenting the tales of Persian kings and warriors in an even more exaggerated form, he would then rhetorically ask the people whether his stories were better, or those of Mohammad. Eventually, Nadhr ibn Harith was taken captive and slain in the Battle of Badr.

In present-day Mecca, no one would be able to summon up the courage to ask whether his stories were better, or those of Mohammad. How then did Nadhr ibn Harith summon up the courage to utter these words in the Mecca of fourteen hundred years ago? The reason is that, in those days, the status of the Quran and Mohammad was a matter of controversy; now, with the long passage of time, the divine origin of the Quran, and the prophethood of Mohammad, have become established facts.

It is here that we can see the high moral and spiritual courage of the Companions of the Prophet. They believed in the Prophet when his name had not become a golden legacy of history. At that time, he was just Mohammad – a man with a message which he said came from God. They believed in him solely on the basis of the substance of his message, not because of any glorious tradition associated with his name. Those who believe in him today are just continuing a tradition which goes back fourteen hundred years; those who believed in him in those days were treading a previously untrdden path, one along which only the strength of true conviction could carry them.

A Purposeful Life

An express train is tearing at full speed towards its destination. A continuous spectacle of lush crops and brimming streams and brooklets flashes by on either side. However much the scene attracts attention towards itself, the express train shows no interest in it. It ploughs through plain and mountain, over land and river, without reducing its speed. Small stations are dotted along the line, but even they do not interrupt the train's motion. It carries on, as if it will stop nowhere.

It is much the same with a purposeful life. One who has adopted a purpose in life will fix his attention upon it. He will not waste his time with peripheral issues. A purposeful person is like a traveller who seeks to spend every moment of his time steering himself towards his destination. Alluring worldly attractions hover enticingly before this traveller, but he closes his eyes to them. Luxurious shade invites him to be cooled from the scorching sun. Lavish mansions call him to rest his feet from the long, hard road. But he has no time for these things: all he sees is the goal he has set before him. All kinds of different requirements confront him, but he steers clear of them and continues on his way. His determination to reach his destination does not alter with the ups and downs of life. The speed and direction of his journey remain constant through thick and thin.

A purposeful person is quite unlike a wayward traveller who, lacking direction, sometimes sets off in one direction and sometimes in another. He knows where he is going. The road that he must tread clearly stretches out before his eyes. There is no question of him interrupting his journey or diverting his attention towards other things. He travels on and on until his purpose is fulfilled, his destination reached.

For life to be invested with meaning, it is essential that one should set a target for oneself. One should be absolutely certain of the worthwhile nature of one's chosen target. In pursuit of it, one must have the total support of one's conscience. It should permeate one's entire being, running through one's body as blood runs through one's veins. It is by concentrating his mind and setting his heart on a certain target that man becomes different from animals. If he lacks a target in life, there is no difference between himself and beasts of the jungle. When one adopts a dominating purpose, one's life undergoes a drastic change. One becomes a completely different person. So total is one's absorption in one's quest in life that one has no time for petty side issues. One pursues one's goal with unswerving dedication, not resting until it is achieved.

13 July 1986

The Deserving Ones

A man, born into a good family, experienced a decline in his fortunes. Financially, he had reached a point where he was living on the breadline. As time went on he eventually found himself without friends. Even his relatives deserted him. He had no one to confide in. No one even greeted him on his way.

Then, one fine day, his fortunes miraculously changed, and he acquired an affluence unrivalled in his town. Suddenly his old friends and relatives started flocking back to him, full of reassurances that they had always wished him well. Their reassurances, however, failed to convince him. To none of these people did he pay any regard. But there was one person who had stood by him through thick and thin. This faithful friend was shown great favour, and taken into the man's confidence.

So it is with God. The man of sterling value in God's sight is one who proves his mettle under adverse conditions; one who recognizes the message of truth even when to do so is to swim against the tide of his environment; one who adheres to his faith, even in the face of ridicule and scorn from those who judge only by appearances.

It is the spirit in which people do things that matters to God, not the physical quality of their actions. God will be well pleased with one who submitted to Him while His power still lay in the realm of the unseen. To do this requires inward vision – the capacity to see things that do not meet the outward eye. One who has this vision will find his place with God.

What this signifies is that it is at times of destitution that a person is chosen for great rewards. It is when ignorance is the order of the day that knowledge truly shows itself. One who sticks to his beliefs even when the world is pouring scorn on him is the one who will be brought close to God.

The Greatest Teacher: Death

Once when Julius Caesar had occasion to pass by a statue of Alexander the Great in Spain, he paused to gaze upon it and, tears coming into his eyes, he said, "In the whole of my life I have not been able to achieve even one tenth of the feats performed by Alexander in the space of a single decade."

Alexander the Great (356-323 BC), the son of the Greek King Philip, conquered the greater part of the known world of his time in a mere ten years. Taking up a project entertained by his father, Alexander decided to attack the huge Persian Empire, marched in 334 into Asia Minor and quickly subjugated the cities in that region. He then conquered with comparative ease Phoenicia and Syria, and although he met with serious resistance at Tyre, he overcame this with the help of a fleet and the city was destroyed. Next he went to Egypt, which submitted to him without a struggle. To this day the city of Alexandria, which he founded still exists as a monument to his victory in Egypt. Setting out on a further career of victory, he passed through Syria into Persia (now Iran) and marched up the valley of the Tigris through Mesopotamia (now Iraq). He captured Susa, Persepolis, Ecbatana and other Persian cities with their treasures and advanced as far as the Caspian Sea. The barbarian tribes dwelling on the coast of this sea were promptly brought under his rule. Alexander did not tolerate opposition, always pursuing a policy of nipping it in the bud. The new empire was organized, into provinces, each keeping its own traditions and institutions. About this time he crushed a rising led by Bessus, the successor of Darus. He next entered India, crossing the Indus near Attock in 32 and winning a great victory. After some further conquests, he returned through Baluchistan to Persepolis, then set himself to organise the great empire he had conquered.

Alexander was a great administrator as well as a great soldier, and spread the influence of Greece throughout the empire he had won. But what did fate have in store for him? In the midst of this tremendous task and while planning a fresh expedition into Arabia, he died in the ancient city of Babylon – as defenceless in the face of death as any poor man in his miserable hut. Although he started out on a career of conquest that has few if any parallels in world history, his life was too short for his empire to be welded together. And his only son having been killed in battle, none of his acquisitions could be handed down to a long line of heirs. His vast empire was then divided up between three military officers, none of whom was in any way related to him, and there being no further cohesive or unifying force to hold it together, it was not long before his hard-won empire had disintegrated.

When death comes, it impresses upon the immediate beholders of its ravages just how helpless man is before his Maker. Death strikes all around him, sparing, neither the high nor the low, yet people who are not directly affected fail, sadly, to understand its significance. It has a lesson to teach, but man ignores it. And if he has paid no heed to the most urgent realities of life, death will certainly leave him no respite to

cogitate upon them at that time, and there will be no breathing space for him to learn lessons which he should have learned long before.

Death is the greatest teacher, but man lives out his life as if there were no such thing awaiting him at the end of life's journey.

15 July 1986

The Hunter Hunted

"The big cats often turn into man-eaters when they are too old to hunt and trap wild animals. But nine times out of ten, they do so because a poacher has wounded them." (*The Times of India*, 21 May 1984)

A tiger is not a man-eater by nature, but as an enemy-eater he is the most merciless of animals. A huntsman who fails to kill a tiger and leaves him injured and in agony becomes the 'enemy'. And so anything in human shape is likewise the enemy and our normally pacific tiger, who formerly stole quietly away at man's approach, is now a fully-fledged man-eater. A tiger, once having been injured, will unhesitatingly deliver a death-blow to avenge the wrong done to him.

This law of nature applies equally to nations. If you cannot annihilate your enemy, do not go so far even as to injure him, because a wounded enemy is more hostile and more dangerous than ever.

When an enemy is attacked without due preparation, it is like digging one's own grave. The impatient, the superficial in thought, unable to engage in a silent, persistent struggle, attack their enemy only to scar him, thus turning him into the worst of scourges.

Before one deplores the cruelty of an enemy, one should take due note of the amount of provocation he has suffered.

16 July 1986

Admitting one's Faults

A young player, who had participated in a big football match for the first time, wrote to his father after his team had been defeated: "Our opponents had discovered a great gap in our defence line, and that was me."

Such acceptance of one's shortcomings requires courage, and it is something without which we cannot make social progress. There are very few defeats which are not attributable to a gap in the line of defence. The best remedy is to accept that this is so, and in that way, the problem is half-solved at the outset. Once a defaulter has recognised his deficiencies, it is but a short step from there either to allowing himself to be replaced by someone with superior talents, or to putting his best efforts into improving his own performance.

The most important cognitive and moral act in life is recognition of the truth. Faith is recognition of the greatness of God in comparison to man. Paying your dues to others is recognition of their rights. Repentance is recognition of the fact that the right thing is what to God is right, and that the wrong thing is what to God is wrong. The key to all kinds of reform in life is frank recognition of shortcomings. If a wrong-doer does not admit his mistakes when he errs – and he does so frequently – there is no way that he can reform himself.

The humble admission of one's mistakes, followed by a rational appraisal of them is the first step on the road to success. But it is rarely that the average individual manages to bring himself to the point of doing so. Whenever he is at fault, he finds it a psychological necessity to cover up his mistakes. His honour is at stake. It is then that he stoops to lies, deceit and false arguments as face-saving devices. This can only lead to moral ruination. The harm done is often irreparable and in the long run he frequently finds himself forced to pay for his initial mistakes with his honour, reputation, career – sometimes, indeed, with his very life. If only people could swallow their pride sufficiently at the outset to make a candid admission of their faults, they could in all humility reset their course towards success, with clearer vision and the will to make far greater efforts than ever before.

16 July 1986

Connection with God nourishment for the soul:

The Prophet said: "When I pass vigil, I am given food and drink by a Gracious Bestower."

17 July 1986

Two Pictures

A certain Jew lived near Shaykh Bayazid Bastami, the great Sufi saint. When this saint passed away, someone asked the Jew why it was that he had not accepted Islam. The Jew answered: "I see two Islams, neither of which can I accept. On the one hand there is the Islam of Shaykh Bayazid Bastami, which it is beyond my capacity to follow. Then there is the Islam of most Muslims, which I would be ashamed to make my own."

Let us take a look at the religion a non-Muslim onlooker would see in the example set by Bayazid Bastami. He would see a life of renunciation, total retreat – from the world and unstinted devotion. Great feats of endurance are its hallmark: nights spent in vigil, days in lengthy recitations; arduous pilgrimages, punctuated by prayer at almost every step; memorized incantations, repeated over and over again, thousands of times.

The religion a non-Muslim onlooker would see in the rank and file of Muslims, on, the other hand, might be one which appears far from the true Islam: talking about faith but acting in one's own interests; much prostration before God, but little humility before men. And what is the good of reciting the Quran, the observer might think, when he sees the Muslims' observance of this common practice, if one does not act on it in one's everyday life? Is this true religion, to bear the banner of Islam where it carries credit, but to have nothing to do with Islam when there is no credit to be gained thereby? The impression a non-Muslim onlooker might receive is one of Muslims misusing their religion as a pretext for pursuing nationalistic ends, as divine sanction for selfish ambitions.

Islam is a simple, natural religion, possessing a tremendous inherent appeal to human nature. Because of the directness of this appeal, the religion of Islam spread, over a large portion of the globe in the first phase of Islam in the time of Prophet and his companions. Later, however, contrived, innovative versions of Islam began to appear, with the result that Islam lost its natural appeal. Islam is a religion which has been preserved in its entirety. For this to be restored, all artificial veils have to be removed from the face of Islam. Islam has to be revealed in its true original form, as it is reserved in the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet. Its spread will then be phenomenal, as in the early days (110:28).

18 July 1986

The Beginning, Not the End

On July 18, 1981, a railway guard by the name of Jabir Husain set off on his very last official journey on the railways. On the following day, his long period of service would be over. It was with a great sense of pleasurable anticipation that he contemplated the life of retirement which now stretched out before him – a life of ease with the freedom to do exactly as he pleased. As he was setting off on this last journey, he said with great satisfaction to his colleagues, "From tomorrow I shall be starting out on a new life!" Prophetic words, for this journey was to be his last in more senses than one. The express train on which he was travelling was a mere sixty kilometers away from its destination when it collided with a goods train and Jabir Husain was killed outright. A railway officer, commenting on this irony of fate said, "Just another sixty kilometers and it would have been the end of his official journey." (*Indian Express*, 18, July, 1981).

Who does not picture to himself a long and eventful life? Everyone thinks that he will reach some great and interesting turning point in his life in just "another sixty kilometers". But before the sixty-kilometer mark can be reached, the angels of death swoop down upon him, and catching him unaware, bear him off to another world. Everyone is constantly making plans for the life he will lead tomorrow, but it is only when death strikes with lightning speed that he quite finally understands that his 'tomorrow' will be – not in this world – but in the next, eternal world. Where he had believed implicitly that he was nearing the end of some agreeable terrestrial journey and approaching some highly coveted goal, he was, in fact, upon the brink of eternity – at the beginning of things not the end.

18 July 1986

Misplaced Compassion

Swami Vivekanand was a spiritual rationalist. One day, people who were supposed to be cow-worshippers came to him and asked him to help them to worship the cow. Swamiji asked them: what are you doing for the people of Bengal who are dying of hunger? The cow worshippers replied that people in Bengal were dying as a result of their Karma. Swamiji replied: Cows too are dying as a result of their Karma.

Illustrated Weekly, 16.5.1976.

Reckoning with Oneself before Being Reckoned With

The Prophet Mohammad once said: "Reckon with yourselves before being reckoned with." After death, all mankind will be gathered before God to be judged. God has knowledge of the unseen. No one will be able to hide anything from Him. For this reason one whose actions are first subjected to scrutiny on Judgement Day will be doomed to damnation. As the Prophet Mohammad put it: "He who is examined will be doomed." Wise, then, is the one who – before being subjected to cross-examination in God's court of justice – cross-examines himself in the court of his own conscience. It is better to reckon with oneself in this world, putting one's own house in order before it is subjected to divine inspection.

Man has been created with a conscience. This conscience irks him when he does something wrong. He also has recourse to the teachings of God and His prophets, which enable him to distinguish between right and wrong. Self-reckoning – or introspection – can be conducted in the light of these two faculties – the conscience of man and the revelation of God.

One instinctively feels aggrieved when mistreated or wronged by another. No one appears more abhorrent to one than one's oppressor. One feels resentment and aversion for the way one has been treated. A true believer is one who harbours intense feelings of this nature about himself, when he goes wrong. He is alive to his own shortcomings, as normally people are to the shortcomings of others. Immediately, on the perpetration of some misdeed, he realizes with full force the consequences of his action. He knows that he has devalued himself in the sight of God and proved himself unworthy of God's eternal blessings. So strong is the feeling of remorse that surges within him that he hates himself for what he has done. His self-scrutiny is severe and uncompromising, as is normally the case with people's scrutiny of others.

Such people belong to God. They are the ones who have sold themselves in return for paradise with God. They will be kept away from the torment of the Fire because they kept away from evil in the world. No blame will be laid upon them in the presence of the Lord. Instead, the gates of heaven will be opened to them, and they will be allowed to enter through whichever one they please.

Rise Like the Phoenix

America's participation in the Second World War (1939-45) was initially indirect, in the sense that its role was to supply arms and ammunition and give para-military assistance to Britain and its allies. As a result, it became an enemy in the eyes of the Japanese. Japan then secretly planned and launched a major offensive against the American naval base, Pearl Harbour on the 7th of December, 1941, completely destroying it and, as a consequence, bringing the U.S.A. directly into the fray. (It did not, however, manage to do any major damage in the American Air Force which was spread over a number of other bases.)

It was at this time that the atomic bomb was being developed in America. When it had been brought to the stage when it could be successfully used as a lethal weapon, America issued the ultimatum to Japanese that they should either surrender unconditionally or prepare to be annihilated. Japan, being completely ignorant of America's acquisition of atomic power, paid no heed to this warning. On August 14, 1945, America, therefore, dropped two atomic bombs on Japan, one on each of the two major cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Within a matter of moments, Japan's military power was reduced to ashes. Japan could do little else but lay down its arms.

Soon afterwards, General Douglas Mac Arthur entered Japan, and placed the entire nation under American military control. Although from purely military point of view, Japan had been defeated, the Japanese were still frenziedly preoccupied with the notion of military retaliation. At one time, they had been so fired with military zeal that, during the war, they would even go to the extent of tying bombs on to the bodies and jumping down the tunnels of ships so that they could not fail to make a direct hit. Now, the problem facing MacArthur was how to direct such fanaticism towards some positive, peaceful goal. An American commentator Author Lewis, writes: "When Japan surrendered, 40 years ago, General Douglas MacArthur undertook not just to occupy, but to remake the country. If he had been asked then what his most extravagant hope was, I think he might have said: to channel the drive of this aggressive people away from militarism and into economic ambition."

One way for the Japanese to respond to American overtures would have been to engage in unending guerilla warfare. Or they could have resorted to verbal protests, in the press and from public rostrums, just as Muslims continue to do. But Japan unreservedly accepted the proposals of its conqueror and immediately began diverting its energies away from war and towards progressive ends. It totally ceased its direct confrontation with America and concentrated all of its energies on scientific education and technical progress. Japan began to make rapid economic advances which culminated in great commercial successes. In 1971, for example, it exported to America goods to the value of 6 billion dollars.

A book entitled, *Japan: The 40-year Miracle*, (Newsweek, 12 August, 1985) which elaborates at length upon the total destruction of Japan and its extraordinary progress in the space of 40 years, sums up the position in just one sentence: "The nation rose like the mythical phoenix from its own ashes."

Japan has been able to achieve such phenomenal progress as compared with its conqueror, that the latter has ultimately been forced to admit defeat.

The acceptance of reality is the greatest secret of success in this life. Yet, how many do we see around us who persist in seeking success through a denial of reality.

21 July 1986

All power belongs to God

The Prophet sent Dhammam ibn Thaalaba to preach the message of monotheism to the Banu Saad ibn Bakr tribe. He came before them and urged them to forsake idolatry. "What terrible gods – Lat and Uzza – you have chosen," he said. "Don't say such things," they warned him. "Aren't you afraid of being stricken by leucoderma, leprosy or madness?" Lat and 'Uzza were the idols that these people worshipped. They feared that, by condemning them, Dhammam was exposing himself to insanity, or illnesses such as leucoderma or leprosy. "Woe betide you," Dhammam replied. "Lat and 'Uzza can do one neither harm nor good."

1. The compiler of the *Kitabus Sunan* or "Book of Traditions," This work is counted one of the six *Sahihs*, or authentic collections of *Hadith*.

Sign of the Mind

Food and sleep are the two most basic requirements of every human being. At nightfall, a person feels tired and goes to sleep. At certain times during the day, he feels hungry and has something to eat. These are experiences common to every individual, irrespective of his or her position in life. But everyone has also experienced, at times of shock and distress, a curtailment of these normal bodily functions. Now, night comes, but one cannot sleep. Meal times come and go without one feeling any urge to have something to eat.

Modern research has shown that all this has to do with the mind. On the outside, man's body is made up of various different systems. Yet all of these have one thing in common: they all operate under the command of the mind. Whether it is eating or sleeping, or any other activity, a person performs these actions when the mind tells him to. When the mind is disturbed, it ceases to issue its normal commands to the rest of the body, with the result that the body ceases to function normally. This is something that happens on a small scale, within the tiny confines of the human frame, but is a sign of events that take place on a far grander scale. The way the mind functions in the body helps us to see how God Himself functions in the universe.

The relationship between the mind and the body is the very same as the relationship between God and the universe at large. On the outside, the universe appears complete in itself, an intricate structure of causes and effects. But all this is controlled by the Supreme Mind that is God. Nothing happens in the world without God giving the command. The alternation of night and day, the growing of crops in the earth, the falling of rain from the sky, the vital interplay of the forces of life and death – all these events occur at the instigation of the Universal Mind. In the words of the Quran, He says to a thing: "Be: and it is." Until He has given the word, nothing can come to pass.

That is how things have been created in this world. Here, events in the physical world are symbolic; they show us the nature of metaphysical realities. So it is with the relationship between the mind and the body; it shows us the nature of the relationship between God and the universe. If a person really wants to become acquainted with God, he need look no further than his own self. But all the signs in the world will fail to show him the way if he does not possess the will to learn.

23 July 1986

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

I have had the unmistakably golden opportunity of coming across an issue of your publication *Al-Risala*, March 1986, No. 26 and I am highly well impressed. It was quite a rare experience to see such correct thought and belief in such Islamically profound, yet appealingly modern garb. It is indeed a decisive step in the cause of making Islam what is meant to be a universal religion. I pray to Allah for our continued enlightenment and guidance on His way.

(MRS) SA'ADATU D. ALIYU (NYSC)
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Your magazine is truly refreshing in that it avoids petty politics, factionalism, sectarianism, etc., and just concentrates on the Islamic message. I very much agree with the editorial in your latest issue (No. 23).

I hope and pray that your magazine may one day be made available free of charge to all people, just like the Christian's "The Plain Truth" (U.S.A). I pray that Allah help me in the near future to make it into a reality.

SALEEM HABIBULLAH
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Australia

I would like to congratulate you on the initiative you have shown in producing the *Al-Risala*. However, I feel that it will in the end only reach the converted as there is so little general public interest in Islam.

In a way, a more effective method of reaching out to people would be to have short, interesting articles sent to the Sunday newspapers, which explain the reality of Islamic law such as the Prophet's extraordinarily modern attitude towards the rights of women. Couched in good language with examples, they might help to dispel some of the prejudices against Islam which have done so much to create barriers between people.

TARA ALI BAIG
An-Noor
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I am very happy to have received a copy of your monthly magazine, "Al-Risala" edited by our good brother Maulana Wahiduddin Khan. It is cleanly printed and well presented. Please accept my warmest congratulations on this useful publication.

Dr. INAMULLAH KHAN

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Pakistan

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The Way of the Companions

Yazid, son of Muawiyah, the first Umayyad Caliph, sent a proposal to Abu Darda, a companion of the Prophet, asking for the hand of his daughter, Darda, in marriage. Quite unaccountably, Abu Darda turned the proposal down. One of Yazid's acquaintances then asked his permission to marry Darda himself, but, at first, Yazid refused. Later, when the man became insistent, he withdrew his objections. This second proposal of marriage was then sent to Abu Darda, this time, he gave his consent. People were amazed at Abu Darda's rejection of Yazid's proposal and his acceptance of that of a humble Muslim. "I did it for Darda's sake," he explained. "What would you have me do? Were Darda to have eunuchs standing at her bedstead, and were she able to gaze on mansions dazzling to the eye, what, then, would become of her faith?

The simple fact of Abu Darda's being a companion of the Prophet largely explains his attitude to his daughter's future. His refusal of Yazid, heir to the expanding Islamic empire, and his acceptance of a commoner illustrates the aspirations that, as a Muslim parent, one should have for one's child. One should be concerned, above all, about the faith of all of one's children. Over and above temporal security, it should be the eternal well-being of one's progeny with which one should be preoccupied. A child's worldly future should be of minimal concern; it is his or her everlasting future that should come first and foremost.